

that position. He had seen something in me that I had not seen in myself. Our personal relationship became even closer when we traveled together to Israel in the 1980s. He became like a second father to me.

He later encouraged me to run for the second highest position in the State of Maryland House of Delegates, Speaker pro tempore. He was the first person to encourage me to run for Congress in 1996. I recount these personal influences because Clarence Blount's impact upon my life was not unique. He touched everybody he could. He never ceased being a teacher who found his greatest reward in the accomplishments of his students.

About a year and a half ago, Clarence Blount and I were both asked to speak at a neighborhood housing event in the Ashburton section of Baltimore. I thanked him for being such a magnificent and significant part of my life, for seeing qualities in me that I had not realized in myself. I also thanked him for fighting for our neighborhoods in Baltimore and for giving our communities a voice in Annapolis.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand today to salute a great American who came up through difficult times, an ordinary man called to an extraordinary mission.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. TIAHRT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TIAHRT. addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXPANSION OF MANDATE OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE-VETERANS AFFAIRS JOINT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill that would greatly expand the mandate of the Department of Defense-Veterans Affairs Joint Executive Committee. This committee would be tasked to oversee the realm of collaborative efforts of not just health, but also benefits and other areas to promote increased resource sharing between the two departments.

While statutory authority to allow resource sharing has existed for more than 20 years, the latest figures tell us that the level of sharing between the VA and DOD remains relatively low. The Federal Government can and must do more to increase resource sharing whenever and wherever feasible.

This bill would allow the Joint Executive Committee to identify changes in policies, to improve services, efficiencies and opportunities for collaboration in order to deliver benefits and services to beneficiaries of both departments. Inefficiencies and duplication

not only waste taxpayer dollars, they shortchange military personnel, retirees and veterans seeking the services offered by VA and DOD.

I believe the expansion of this Joint Executive Committee would facilitate necessary discussions and decisions that will ultimately lead to greater efficiencies within and between the two departments. I would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) of the Veterans Affairs Committee for his cooperation in developing this very important piece of legislation. It is time that these departments seize the opportunity and take full advantage of the benefits that come from sharing their extensive resources.

EXTENDING THE TEMPORARY EMERGENCY UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION PROGRAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the many hard-working families in our country that cannot make ends meet as this economy slows and the job market continues to weaken.

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These families are the main reason we must absolutely extend the temporary emergency unemployment compensation program, TEUC; and they are the reason we must do it now. With the current high unemployment rate of 5.8 percent, unemployment benefits are the same as when the TEUC program was first established in March of 2002, over a year ago, and reextended in January, 2003. Just last week the Department of Labor reported that new applications for unemployment insurance hit the high number of 455,000 applicants for the week ending April 19. This is the highest level in more than a year. And it does not count families who have exhausted their benefits and still are not working.

Mr. Speaker, in March of this year, millions of workers had exhausted their regular unemployment benefits which continues the pattern of the past 24 months, where the numbers of unemployed workers receiving aid is absolutely and actually increasing. Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there is a real need for unemployed worker relief in this Nation, but we do not need numbers and we do not need statistics to alert us to this growing problem. Just listen to the words from letters I have received from my constituents in the Sixth Congressional District of California. And when the Members hear their words, they will know that there is immediacy for additional unemployment insurance benefits, and they will know that it is important that people in districts like mine, Marin and Sonoma Counties, where the unemployment is not as dire

as some other areas in the country, still have needs as well as the rest of the Nation.

One constituent writes: "I have a master's degree and have not been able to find work. I also deal with a chronic illness. I find myself applying for food stamps and soon will be unable to pay any bills. I'm not sure I will have a roof over my head before long. A lot of people are having a very difficult time. Please try to make unemployment benefits a top priority."

Another writes: "I have been actively seeking work since the end of March, 2002, without success. I am a 55-year-old man who has never had a problem staying fully employed until this year. I have never before been affected by the reluctance of employers to hire older people. That, coupled with the stagnant economy, has made my ability to earn a living terrifyingly difficult. Unemployment compensation has kept food on my table for my family, but I worry what will happen next month."

These letters show how desperately workers need help. They need help just to keep their heads above water so their families can have the food and shelter they need to be healthy and safe, so their families can eat while their parents continue to search for work.

It is important that this Congress take action to make sure no family goes without basic needs like food or money for bills. That is why I support the gentleman from New York's (Congressman RANGEL) bill, H.R. 1652, the Unemployment Benefits Extension Act. This would provide 26 weeks of extended benefits through November, 2003. The consideration of this bill is critical as many unemployed workers once again find themselves reaching the end of unemployment benefits. If these benefits are not extended, in most States workers exhausting their regular benefits after May 31 of this year will receive no further assistance.

Extending these benefits would also give the economy a boost, Mr. Speaker, because unemployed workers would have money for purchases. Otherwise, without these benefits, these workers, unemployed workers, will have to curtail their spending, which would weaken the economy and continue the domino effect, causing even more job loss.

Economy.com analysis found that extension of the Federal unemployment insurance benefits would be the single most effective action that Congress could take now to boost the economy and protect jobs.

TERRORISM

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FEENEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take this opportunity to comment on some recent developments in the Middle East.